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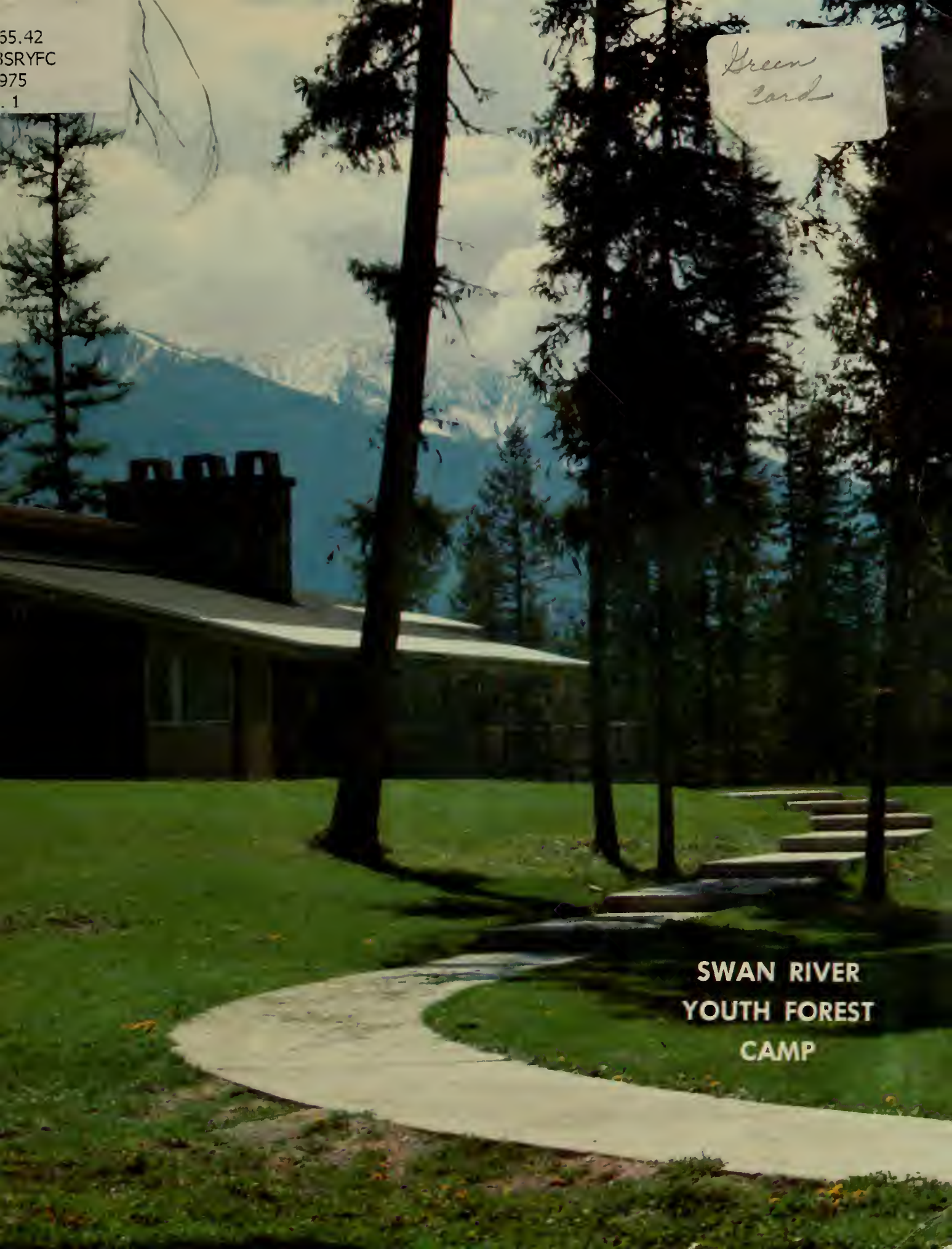

# SWAN RIVER YOUTH FOREST CAMP

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Located in the rustic 39,000-acre Swan River State Forest in northwestern Montana, the Youth Camp is approximately 50 miles south of Kalispell on Highway 209. The Swan Valley is nestled between the Swan and Mission Mountain Ranges. A spectacular natural setting, the area is noted for its beautiful forests, mountain lakes, and crystal streams. Deer, elk, bear, and other wildlife abound in the Swan Valley Forest which also harbors numerous species of wild flowers and foliage.

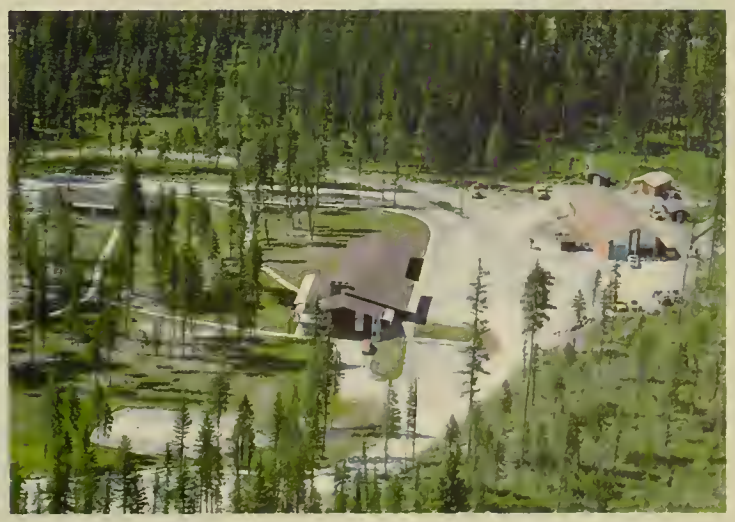
## WHAT IS THE SWAN RIVER YOUTH FOREST CAMP?

The Swan River Youth Forest Camp is a minimum security correctional facility for young law offenders aged 16-25 referred to the Camp by the district courts of Montana.

The Camp is under the auspices of the State of Montana Department of Institutions and assisted by the Department of Natural Resources' Division of Forestry and the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services.

The purpose of the Camp is to provide young offenders with social and physical rehabilitation along with the opportunity to acquire basic work skills.

Four main buildings comprise the Camp's physical complex: the main lodge building, dining hall, administration building, and mechanical shop.



## RESIDENTS

Most of the residents are evaluated by the Pine Hills School for Boys in Miles City, and some are screened and referred through the Montana State Prison at Deer Lodge.

The Camp was established primarily to help first offenders. It serves as an alternative to incarcerating young men with hardened, repeated lawbreakers.

The Swan River staff suggests an average stay of six to eight months for optimal growth and development of a resident.

## COUNSELING

Counseling is a major factor in the Camp's rehabiltative program. A unique aspect of Swan River Youth Forest Camp is that each counselor is involved in all aspects of group life. They live, work, and play with the residents. Their lives are integrated through case work counseling, recreational activities, and other group functions.

When he arrives, a resident is assigned to one of the Camp's nine full-time counselors. The counselor works individually with the young man helping him cope with his problems and plan a constructive future. The counselor-resident relationship has proved effective in teaching residents how to function independently in society. Residents learn to establish positive relationships with adults as well as with peers.

Camp counselors have a bachelor's degree in social sciences or a related field and at least one year experience as a counselor or social worker.

## WORK PROGRAM

The Camp's work program encompasses a variety of areas and serves as an effective rehabilitative resource. Several work programs are available for the residents: Forestry, Carpentry, Mechanics, and Camp Maintenance.

FORESTRY: Residents can learn nearly all phases of forestry work while engaged in a number of forest conservation practices from planting to fire-fighting. Directed by the Division of Forestry, the residents are involved in making permanent improvements in the environment and have one of the best fire-fighting crews in the region.

CARPENTRY: Residents who elect to participate in carpentry are taught to make cabinets, camp tables, fire towers, and even prefabricated buildings. Everything the residents construct is used by the Division of Forestry and the state parks.

MECHANICS: Mechanics is another work option the Camp offers. The young men involved in this program are responsible for maintaining the Camp's vehicles and converting military vehicles into fire-fighting equipment for the Division of Forestry.

In addition to formal work programs, residents are responsible for the daily maintenance of the Camp. They work in food service, laundry, and groundskeeping. It should be noted that the staff realizes that not all the residents are cut out to be foresters, mechanics, cooks, or carpenters. Therefore, the emphasis is not placed so much on "vocational" training as it is on evaluation of the residents' work capabilities and development of good work habits.

# SCHOOL PROGRAM

The Camp's educational programs are structured to help a resident prepare himself for a productive life. Classes are held in the evening hours after work from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Residents may take courses leading to a General Equivalency Degree (GED) as well as courses in practical education and remedial English and mathematics.

In the last three years, of those residents who have contracted to take the high school equivalency exam, 85% have completed the course and have been awarded a G.E.D. certificate.

The broad scope of the Camp's school program offers some type of education for all the residents. One special educational program is the "special needs" program. It is designed to help residents master practical skills such as drivers' education, balancing a checkbook, or filling out job application forms.

A resident enrolls in an education program on a contract basis. He chooses his goals and agrees to fulfill the stated objectives of his contract. All educational programs are voluntary, however, residents are offered incentives ranging from nominal additional pay to special privileges to enroll in and complete their course work.

Modern instructional facilities at the school include all aspects of audio-visual communications. Educational television, tape recording, and video taping are particularly effective teaching tools.

## RECREATION

The Swan River Youth Camp activities are often dictated by the weather because the Camp does not have a gym. Outdoor activities include: swimming, fishing, camping, hiking, basketball, softball, volleyball, tobogganing, sledding, and snow sculpture. Indoor activities available are: pool, Ping-Pong, television, Football, reading, craft-making, card playing, and other games.

The Camp offers a versatile crafts program. Jewelry-making, ceramics, leather work, and beading are among the crafts available to residents.

## HOME LEAVE POLICY

Residents are awarded home leave as part of the Camp's rehabilitative program. During leave, a resident accepts full responsibility for his conduct and is accountable for his actions.

The home leave program is used to evaluate a resident's progress in relating to his family and other adults as well as seek job opportunities.

Residents who have been referred through the Montana State Prison are governed by prison rules; emergency leaves under supervision are the only ones allowed.

# VISITORS

Residents may have visitors on Saturday from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm and on Sundays and nolidays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Members of the immediate family as well as other approved persons may visit. No boy or girl friends may visit unless prior arrangements have been made with the Youth Camp authorities.

Any parent or guardian who can not make arrangements to visit on Saturdays, Sundays or holidays because of working conditions or other special circumstances should write or telephone the Camp to arrange an alternate time for visiting.

CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Regular Sunday church services are available to any resident wishing to attend. All religious activities are voluntary. The camp has a chaplain who visits regularly.

## REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

Rehabilitative Services Division of the Montana Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services maintains a permanent full-time office at the Camp. The Rehabilitation Counselor works with each resident individually and with the institutional staff to develop planning for the youth's return to society. The goal of this agency is to assist the youth toward social stability, independence, and self-sufficiency.

Rehabilitation services might include medical needs, aptitude testing, occupational evaluation and counseling, vocational training, or other assistance that might be necessary to help the client secure and maintain suitable employment. The Rehabilitation Counselor acts to coordinate these various services with Aftercare Division (juvenile residents), the Board of Pardons (adult residents), and the local Rehabilitative Services Division offices throughout the state.

## CREDITS

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